

## [Brains in Obscurity]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 10

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Spector

ADDRESS 4121 Third Avenue, NYC

DATE January 17, 1939

SUBJECT BRAINS IN OBSCURITY

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview During a banquet given at a Bronx neighborhood social club on Boston Road
3. Name and address of informant Jack Turner, alias "The Kid." KEEP IDENTITY CONFIDENTIAL: SEE NOTE
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. None
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

## Library of Congress

None

### 6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Partitioned loft, with raised platform at one end apparently used as stage, long table at one side, posters and mottoes on walls. Typical of numerous workers' clubs in the section. Story is the result of a very brief, informal interview obtained while people were moving about, chatting, eating sandwiches, and kids of various ages were running about.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Spector

ADDRESS 4121 Third Avenue, NYC

DATE January 17, 1939

SUBJECT BRAINS IN OBSCURITY

NOTE: This informant is something of a local character, a somewhat frustrated little fellow in the late thirties or early forties who likes to put on a show of erudition and intellect by sprinkling his monologues with a few fancified phrases. Although fairly well inoculated against serious criticism, he is very sensitive to ridicule, and it is essential to keep his identity undisclosed. He is affectionately known in the neighborhood as "The Kid" and remains, at bottom, rational and well-disposed toward humanity, for which he seems to express contempt. Despite the Marxist flavor of some of his terminology, which has

## Library of Congress

obviously been acquired via the cafeteria, he is in theory at least a rugged individualist who fights the “dominating factors,” as he calls them, singlehandedly. He maintains that the world must be made safe for the intellectual aristocracy, of which select body he is at least a charter member. In speaking, he uses enough energy to supply each of the Interborough Subway lines with electricity for a month's uninterrupted 2 operation. It is said that he plays the violin with equal vehemence, but fortunately I have not been compelled as yet to put this rumour to the proof. He also claimed, half-humorously to be sure, to be a “lawyer de facto if not in fact,” and indeed, he makes a noise like the best of them. The following resume is simply a Vorspeisse (appetizer) of his gab; I intend to obtain larger and juicier samples later on.

---

Wot can you do wid ninety percent of de population which is still obscure? Which instead of admitting it, dey like to give somebody de hee-ho an de high-ho? I said it previously an' I will say it again: dey are merely products of dis procedure of society. When I say products it means products of de social order, of de dominating factors of high finance which I am fighting for years singlehandedly, for deir own benefit which dey will not understand. I see you are more or less a cultured person, you look somewhat intelligent; tell me mister, what is your avocation? I am a musician, it makes no difference one way or de udder, but I would like sometimes to play for you Beethoven an' Bach. Dat is, if you are sincere. I am not so sure of dis; why are you smiling? A person who is cultured should not smile.

You would like to know how I am fighting dese dominating factors of de social order, dese organized banditry? I am fighting dem [constituionally?] constitutionally of course, troo procedures. Frinstance, when de 3 Gas Company comes to my house ta turn off de gas. Dis is a highly organized institution, dis is one of de universal structures of de capitalist system, you admit dis? So I tell dis gasman, No, No, you can't come in here, show me in de Constitution where it says you are permitted to come in my house. Don't worry, I am not afraid of dese people. If I can tell a judge wot I tink of him, which I already have done and

## Library of Congress

I can prove dis, don't tink I will yield so easily. Dis is identically ge work which I am doing. I also understand people, how dey are developing emotionally and how dey stand in our cultural society; dis is a procedure entitled Psychology. Excuse me, stay where you are - dey are calling upon me to give a speech on dis occasion...

(At this point, the informant was actually called upon to take the platform and talk in honor of the guest of the evening, whom he evidently knew quite well. He did so with a great flourish, calling out for silence with a Joe Humphries voice, and launched pell-mell into a harangue of which the following is a very inadequate summation:)

Ladeez an gentlemen, brudders an friends, an fellow workers! Because of dese dominating factors of industry an high finance which you had de privelege of hearing me speaking in de past, so we de people from all de Bronx around came here to pay tribute to a neighbor and a friend, also a partner to me in an enterprise entitled Merit, an I wish to announce it is a great privelege an joy to be elected to dis occasion, so I will speak a few words in de form of a script - I say script,- a script which was projected over de facilities of WOR in de year 1936, 4 which I have written an I can prove dis, de topic of which is entitled, if you please, "A critical satire on Brains, which are being paid to keep udder Brains in Obscurity" which it didn't please de dominating powers in command, so I have anudder title which is addressed to de intelligent an discriminating people in dis vicinity, in brief: "War is imminent and inevitable"...

(I did not attempt to take down the context of The Kid's "Script", which he told me was a two-minute oration given on the "Listener Speaks" program of WOR, but he has promised to make it available to me in the near future.) [??]